

Notes on the birds of the Kampala area

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During the course of several recent visits to Uganda I have spent time at Namulonge Research Station (0°32'N, 32°35'E), 30 km NE of Kampala, Uganda, a locality included by Carswell (1986) in her review of the birds of the Kampala area. Namulonge is an agricultural research station of some 440 ha. While a large part is devoted to crops, in particular cassava, a significant proportion of the land is fallow and down to a mosaic of long and short grassland, secondary bushland on older fallows, fast-disappearing forest remnants and papyrus swamps along drainage lines. These last have been cleared in places for agriculture.

A number of observations made of the birds while there, together with a few made at other sites locally, represent additions to Carswell (1986) or otherwise constitute noteworthy records. Notes are given below for those species of greater interest while the remainder are simply listed with locality and date.

Piapiac Ptilostomus afer

Two individuals were seen by Dr J. F. Walsh and me accompanying cattle at the Dairy College, Entebbe on 18 October 1992. Not mentioned by Carswell (1986) but widely distributed elsewhere in Uganda (Britton 1980).

Greater Swamp Warbler Acrocephalus rufescens

Carswell (1986) gives the status of this species as "recorded only in the literature at Entebbe", while noting that the Lesser Swamp Warbler *A. gracilirostris* to be "found in papyrus swamp, reeds and other lake [Victoria] shore vegetation...". Birds seen well (in response to playback of their vocalizations) in papyrus swamp at Namulonge on 5 April 1992 were identified as *rufescens*. They were conspicuously large, uniform plain dark grey above with no supercilium, while below they were paler grey throughout except for a whitish throat. The legs and feet were heavy, strong and dark, the bill long, fairly heavy and straight. The identification was supported by comparison of the recording with those published by Chappuis (1978) and kindly confirmed by Dr Chappuis himself to whom a copy of the recording was sent. This species had previously been heard and glimpsed on 13 October 1991 and 7 March 1992.

These observations do not conflict with the statement by Britton (1980) that there are no records of *A. rufescens* in the Lake Victoria basin in Uganda since the papyrus swamps at Namulonge form part of the drainage system of the Sezibwe River that feeds northwards into Lake Kyoga.

Singing Cisticola Cisticola cantans

Recorded at Namulonge on 6 October 1991 when two birds were seen and heard calling from a low acacia tree. The song, a loud, penetrative *ke-tink, ke-tink*, closely matched the recordings of this species published by Chappuis (1974). In appearance, a medium-sized cisticola with an unstreaked grey back, a bright rufous crown, nape and wing panel but without the rufous tinge to the face and forehead shown by the Red-faced Cisticola *C. erythrops*, which is very common at Namulonge. The Singing Cisticola was seen on two other occasions at Namulonge, one on both 15 March 1991 and 30

September 1992—the second also seen by Iain Robertson and Alan Brown.

This species is not listed by Carswell (1986). Britton (1980) lists it as being widespread throughout much of Uganda, although less so where *C. erythrops* is common.

Weyns' Weaver *Ploceus weynsi*

This species was observed in Mpanga Forest, 35 km west of Kampala, on 19, 20 and 26 April 1992 when several hundred were seen on each occasion, foraging very actively through the forest in loose flocks. On the last date a group of up to ten was also seen flying over a nearby papyrus swamp, about 5 km south of Mpigi, between Senene and Kasanje. They were also recorded at this locality on 31 October 1992 by Dr J. F. Walsh and me. These too were flying low over the papyrus at dusk in company with loose flocks of large numbers of Black-headed *P. cucullatus*, Yellow-backed *P. melanocephalus* and Vieillot's Black Weavers *P. nigerrimus*. All flew in the same direction, possibly to roost. Under the circumstances, assessing numbers was difficult but over 50 male Weyns' were identified. Weyns' Weaver was also recorded in Bogo Forest on the edge of Lake Victoria, some 30 km southeast of Lugazi—thus not in the Kampala area—on 28 March 1992 when at least 100 were watched gleaning in the forest canopy.

Carswell (1986) states that all recent records of this species "are very local and predominantly from the shore of Lake Victoria at Gaba, Entebbe and Kibanga Port...". The breeding of Weyns' Weaver is unknown although Ash *et al.* (1991) report the collection of a nest possibly of this species. It is worth recording, therefore, that a juvenile was seen to beg and be fed by a female in Mpanga on 26 April 1992.

Yellow-bellied Waxbill *Estrilda melanotis*

Recorded in rank vegetation in abandoned fields at Namulonge on 16 October 1990 (three to four), 29 September 1991 (two), 5 October 1991 (six to seven) and 29 February 1992 (five to six). Not mentioned by Carswell (1986) while Britton (1980) suggest the nearest records are from Mubende to the west and Mt Elgon to the east.

White-collared Olive-back *Nesocharis ansorgei*

Seen at Namulonge at three different sites. Most frequently found in rank vegetation beside partially cleared papyrus swamp where it fed on seed heads of the yellow composite flower *Melanthera scandens*, the only known food plant of this species (Chapin 1959, Goodwin 1982). The species was recorded on 11 occasions in October 1991 and between February and May 1992; a maximum of seven birds, including a group of four, was seen on 29 February 1992.

The Namulonge birds differed from the illustrations and descriptions in the standard works (Mackworth-Praed & Grant 1960, 1973, Williams & Arlott 1980) in two ways. These, and other authors (Ogilvie-Grant 1910, Chapin 1954, Schouteden 1960, Hall & Moreau 1970, Goodwin 1982) indicate the entire head to be black. In all the birds seen the black colouration only extended as far as the hind crown. The nape and hind-neck were grey and formed a much wider collar between the black of the head and the olive mantle than most of the literature suggests. Only Jackson (1938) describes the nape as grey and this feature is apparent in the photograph of a female in Lippens & Wille (1976).

Furthermore, all references consulted state or indicate the breast of the male (not both sexes as Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1960) and Williams & Arlott (1980) imply) to be

wholly olive-green. This colouration is said by Ogilvie-Grant (1910) to extend "across the entire chest in a wide band". On the males seen at Namulonge (at least four) the olive on the breast formed a neat, well-defined and conspicuous crescent, with the points of the crescent meeting the folded wing shoulder, the horizontal upper border just touching the white collar at the centre of the throat and the lower border describing a relatively shallow, even curve across the breast. In consequence, the grey of the lower breast and belly extended up the flanks to the wing shoulder.

The breast pattern of the single male specimen at the British Museum (Nat. Hist.) at Tring, from Mpanga Forest, Fort Portal, is consistent with the published descriptions, as is another single male in the National Museum, Nairobi, from Kalinzu Forest, eastern Uganda (E. Waiyaki, *in litt.*). However, from an examination of the five male skins in Tervuren, Dr M. Louette (*in litt.*) writes that the amount of olive on the breast to be "somewhat variable" and "large crescent-shaped". He suggests the apparent discrepancy between earlier descriptions and my observations to be an artefact of skin preparation.

This species has previously been recorded from the Kampala area, at Gaba on the edge of Lake Victoria (Carswell 1986).

Magpie Mannikin *Lonchura fringilloides*

A group of 10–15 Magpie Mannikins was seen on 1 March 1992 feeding in loose association with a large flock of Red-headed Queleas *Quelea erythrops* on an experimental rice plot at Namulonge. They were similar in size to the queleas with the head, tail and triangular breast patches at the wing shoulder black in colour, while the mantle, coverts and flight feathers were brown with no barring. Below they were plain white; bills blue-black. A further four individuals were seen at the same site, also feeding on rice, on 20 October 1992, of which one was an adult and the other three immatures—head, wings, mantle and tail brown, below buffy throughout, bill dull black, base of lower mandible paler. They were confiding, allowing approach to within 5 m. These consorted with Black and White Mannikins *L. bicolor* while Bronze Mannikins *L. cucullata* are also common at this site.

The only previous Uganda records of this species are from the Bwamba lowlands in the west (Britton 1980). Carswell (1986), however, mentions, but does not accept for lack of detail, a record of this species from Kampala given by Allen & Fripp (1964). Until recently, when Robertson (1992) recorded it from Alupe in western Kenya, a few kilometres from the Ugandan border, the nearest known locality for this species to the east was Taveta in southeastern Kenya (Britton 1980).

Other records of interest, from Namulonge unless stated otherwise

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* One female 13, 19, 20 October 1991.

Banded Snake Eagle *Circaetus cinerascens* One 14 September 1991, pair 5 October 1991.

Little Sparrowhawk *Accipiter minullus* One 1 March 1992.

Gabar Goshawk *Melierax gabar* One immature 7 April 1992.

White-spotted Pygmy Crake *Sarothrura pulchra* Heard in March, September and October (1991 and 1992).

Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis* One male 1 March 1992.

[**African Snipe** *Gallinago nigripennis* The remains of a snipe, badly damaged in a road-kill, were found near the entrance to Namulonge on 2 May 1992. The amount of white in the tail suggested that it was this species.]

Green Wood Hoopoe *Phoeniculus purpureus* Four 14 September 1991; also two at Gayaza (0°27'N, 32°37'E) 19 September 1991.

Yellow-billed Barbet *Trachylaemus purpuratus* Two 2 October 1991.

Buff-spotted Woodpecker *Campethera nivos*a One male 2 October 1991.

African Penduline Tit *Remiz caroli* One 12 October 1991; also three to four at Kifu Forest 4 October 1992.

Slender-billed Greenbul *Andropadus gracilirostris* Up to four on three dates in October 1991.

Black-throated Apalis *Apalis jacksoni* A pair 2 October 1991.

White-winged Warbler *Bradypterus carpalis* Heard October 1991, March–May 1992, two seen 21 March 1992.

Yellow Warbler *Chloropeta natalensis* Seen September, October 1991, March, April 1992 at three different sites within Namulonge.

Carruthers' Cisticola *Cisticola carruthersi* One seen and heard 21, 29 March, 5 April 1992.

Ashy Flycatcher *Muscicapa caerulescens* A pair 15 March 1991.

Grey-throated Flycatcher *Muscicapa griseigularis* One 2 October 1991.

Shrike Flycatcher *Megabyas flammulata* One male 14 September 1991.

African Firefinch *Lagonosticta rubricata* A pair 14 September 1991.

Papyrus Canary *Serinus koliensis* Recorded on nine dates in February, March, April, May, September, October 1991–1992.

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